

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates. The cable ownership

cap is a crucial element of our democratic media, and it should not be weakened.

Concentration of the mass media has already gone much too far. Each time regulation of cable ownership has been pared back, proponents of such moves have claimed deregulation would lower consumer prices. But each time, the result has been dramatically higher cable rates. After the cable television industry was deregulated in 1984, prices soared. From 1986 to 1990, the cost of basic service rose 56 percent -- twice the rate of inflation. And, again, since the deregulatory Telecommunications Act of 1996, cable rates have risen almost three times as fast as inflation.

Such bills are also touted as enhancers of competition, which is so clearly a misrepresentation that I wonder if it even merits a response. Suffice it to say that the gradual drift of media ownership into the hands of fewer and fewer giant monopolies is exactly counter to the ideal of preserving open competition. After the 1984 deregulation, quality of programming plummeted, and cable systems began selling their channels in indivisible blocs that prevented subscribers from voting with their dollars, because there was no one else to turn to.

Also, allowing further concentration of cable system ownership damages the ability of the public to gain access to unbiased information, which is supposed to be a critical function of mass media in a democracy. The less diversity in ownership we have, the less diversity there will be in opinions and perspectives. The handful of giant companies that already dominate what allegedly passes for a "free press" in this country must not be continually given more and more power each time they ask. Quite the contrary. Democracy and the public interest, and the fate of human civilization demand that lawmakers and regulators make a decidedly bold shift away from media monopolization.